

# Presence in remote Antarctic noted and highly appreciated

## Belarus gains observer status on Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programmes

By Tatiana Grigorova

The decision was made during the 24th meeting of the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programmes, held in Portland (Oregon, USA). Belarus took part as a guest and, at the close of the meeting, presented a report on its activity in the Antarctic and its implementation of the National State Antarctic Programme for 2007-2012.

“The contribution of Belarus to international activities in the Antarctic over recent years has been appreciated, resulting in the decision by the permanent members of the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programmes to give the country observer status for three years. After this, the Republic could be considered for permanent membership of this organisation,” explains the Deputy Head of the National Polar Research Centre, the head of the Belarusian Antarctic expedition,



Belarusian polar explorers have long held place in Antarctic

Alexey Gaidashov.

He tells us that support from Russian delegates present was essential in Belarus gaining observer status, as they gave a serious assessment of the Republic's contribution.

Mr. Gaidashov explains that membership of the organisation is a key step in gaining consultative status on the Antarctic Treaty. The Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programmes is, in fact, the second largest organisation in the Antarctic Treaty system. After gaining observer status, a country can become a permanent, consultative member. Mr. Gaidashov continues, “However, we need to be more active in the Antarctic, both practically and scientifically, taking part in the work of various international organisations operating on this continent. An important factor is the availability of national infrastructure in the Antarctic, the creation of which is part of Belarus' plan.”

## At least two more will be added to nine

By Tatiana Grigorova

**The Ramsar Convention Secretariat has approved two applications from Belarus for inclusion of protected areas in its List of Wetlands of International Importance**

Morochno and Duleby-Zaozerie islands are to join nine other wetland areas listed with the Ramsar Convention, with Sary Zhaden also put forward for consideration. Tatiana Trofimovich, of the Land and Landscape Department at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmen-

tal Protection, tells us that members must create at least one Ramsar site, which must comply with complex criteria. Once included on the List of Wetlands of International Importance, information on the site is contained in a database at the International Bureau for the Conservation of Wetlands, and is regularly updated.

At present, nine Ramsar sites are protected in Belarus: Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve; Europe's largest lowland marshes — Sporovskoe and Zvanets; the large and unusual upland marshes of Belarusian Poozerie

Yelnya and Osveiskoye; the transitory marshes of Polesie's lowland Olmany Wetlands; and the marshes, forests and grasslands of the high-water bed of the Pripyat River — Srednyaya Pripyat, Kotra and Prostyr.

The Ramsar Convention, or the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (especially regarding the habitat of waterfowl) was adopted in February 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar. It is the first global international treaty entirely devoted to one type of ecosystem and is supported by 160 countries. Belarus joined in 1990.



Works within Renewal of Belarusian Peat Bogs project

## Did a meteorite fall in the Glubokoe District?

By Daria Svetlovskaya

**News spreads of a meteorite falling near the town of Glubokoe in the Vitebsk Region**

The Internet is full of eyewitness accounts of a strong rumble, a 'bright light' and 'shaking windows': almost a rehearsal of the apocalypse, promised by the Mayan calendar in December...

Igor Sasimovich, who teaches physics and astronomy at a school in Glubokoe, is rather sceptical about the phenomenon, which was observed by many local residents on the night of 15-16th July. He is familiar with the idea of meteorites and considers that our case is similar to that recorded on video by various witnesses in the US states of California and Nevada as recently as April 24th this year, showing a meteorite (thought to have been the size of a washing machine) fall to Earth. There are many assumptions about a domestic meteorite but it would have to be found in order for us to understand what we are dealing with; it caused a great deal of noise and then disappeared.

“It's difficult to understand because of contradictory data regarding where the meteorite fell,” Mr. Sasimovich notes. “The last assumption is that it landed between Miory, Polotsk and Glubokoe, which form a triangle. I think we should look near Lake Sho — a wooded, marshy area. I may be able to gather volunteers to search the land and to question witnesses in detail. If the meteorite burnt up in the



Sign near Lake Sho

atmosphere, we won't be looking for a deep crater in the earth; it's more likely that fragments are scattered over great distances. The blast wave may have left some clear signs.”

If the meteorite did land in one piece, Polotsk Air Department of Bellesavia could help in finding where it fell; they are already airborne and have promised to report any findings.

Vsevolod Bardun, a senior research fellow of the Geological Museum, tells us, “We have a 21kg fragment of the Bragin Iron Meteorite Shower (from 400-500 years ago), which was found in October last year; we're currently testing it under laboratory conditions.” Meanwhile, Alexander Krasovsky, an associate professor of Earth Science and Hydrometeorology Chair at the Belarusian State University, notes that a meteorite shower is certainly expected in August.

Scientists believe that, long ago, a planet exploded, sending fragments into space as an asteroid belt. This will come closer to the Earth by the end of summer, with the chance of some pieces entering our planet's atmosphere. Whether a large meteor or tiny stones fall from the sky, only Heaven knows...